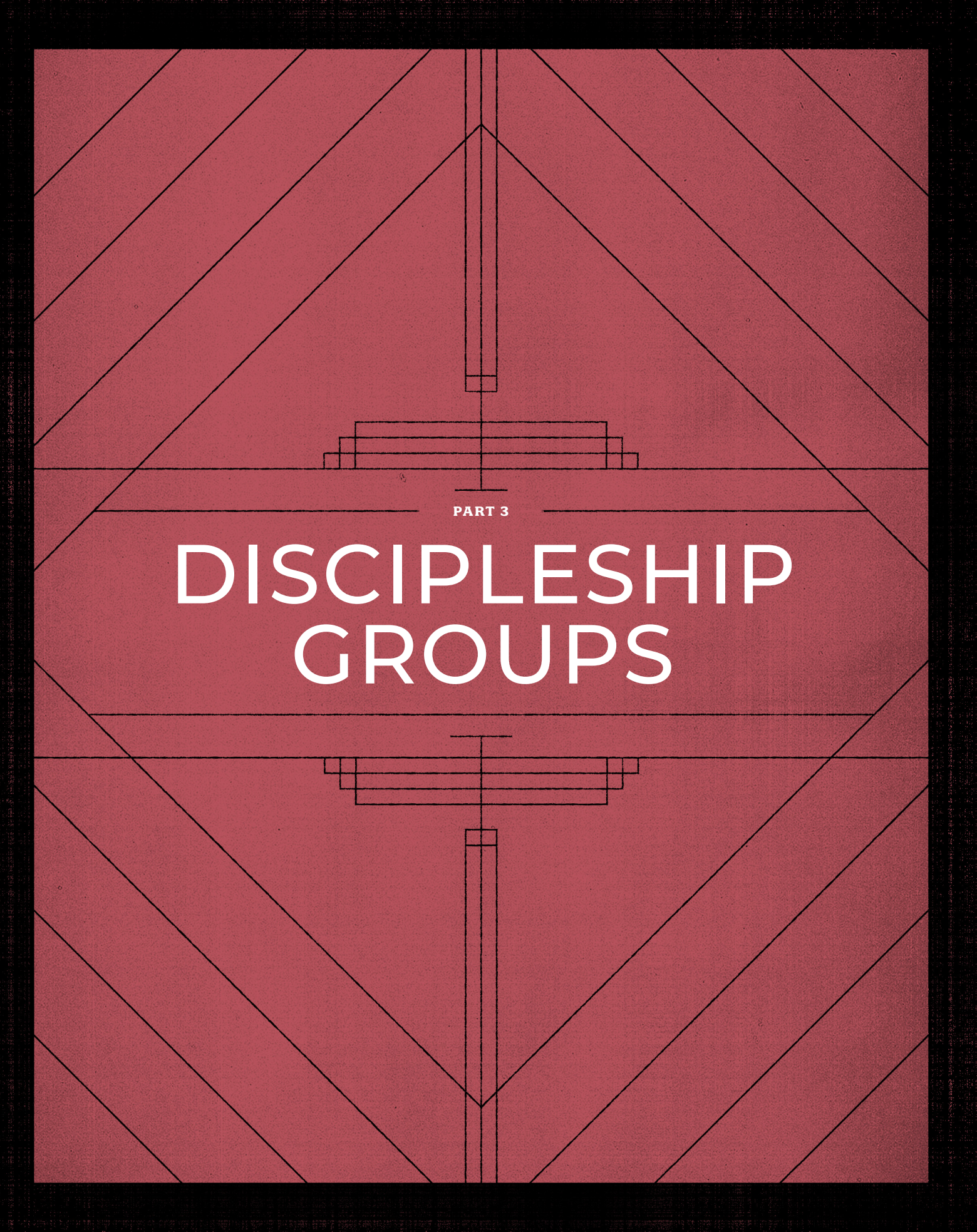
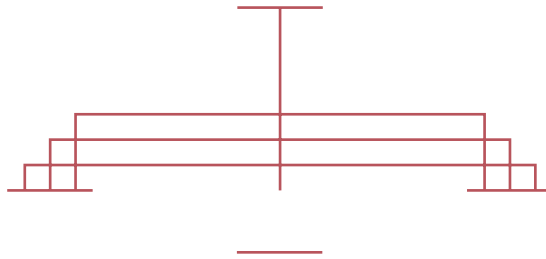




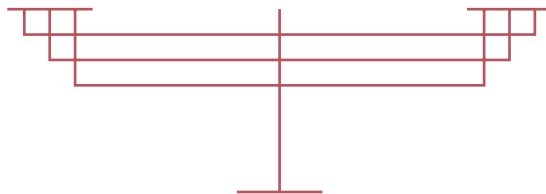
PART 3

DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS



People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.

D. A. CARSON
For the Love of God





PART 3

DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS

Gender-specific groups of three or four who gather regularly to know and encourage one another in their walk with Jesus

WHAT IS A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP?

If community doesn't draw us deeper into discipleship, it will become just another way to hide in plain sight. A discipleship group is ideally formed from within a community group, though there are some exceptions to this. As we grow in trust and safety with one another, we will more effectively be able to disciple one another.

Jonathan Dodson, in his book *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, warns us about the common pitfalls that discipleship groups may face. Our discipleship groups should be centered around the gospel and avoid the ditches of "religious" and "irreligious" groups. Religious discipleship groups traffic in "cuss jar" accountability, where the members can only offer one another shame and punishment. Instead of trusting by faith that Jesus took our punishment on the cross and atoned for our sin, we try to atone for our sins through what Dodson calls "mutual punishment." As a result, religious discipleship groups tempt people to start lying or stop coming. *Religious discipleship groups don't last long because eventually everyone gets bled to death.*

"Irreligious" discipleship groups traffic in "confession booth" accountability, where we confess our sins and pat each other on the back. We leave feeling better, but with little changed or challenged. Instead of passionately pursuing "the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14), irreligious discipleship groups devolve into false peace, where we get things off our chest, but never take steps to grow in obedience. Our confession stops short of repentance as we confess the same sins over and over, but refuse to take violent action against them. *Irreligious discipleship groups don't*

last long because eventually everyone gets bored to death.

On the other hand, in a healthy, gospel-centered discipleship group, we remind each other that while we are more sinful than we dared feared, we are more loved than we dared hope, because of Jesus' death in our place. Together, we confess our sins, we point each other to Jesus, and we encourage each other to live in line with the gospel.

WHAT DOES A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP DO?

When a discipleship group gathers together, it typically includes four movements that help a group become more balanced, biblical, and fruitful.

1. Scripture. Briefly check in on your engagement with Scripture since your last gathering. As David Powlison puts it, what's one bit of Scripture you are applying to one bit of your life? One bit of Scripture can lead you to adore God, see and hate your sin, or ask for grace. To apply one bit of Scripture to one bit of your life requires at least meditation, if not memorization. *This will be the most difficult of the four movements to practice outside of your group, but it will be the single greatest determiner of the quality of what happens in your group.* Consider the sobering reality that many of us do not consistently spend time alone with God—connecting with him through Scripture and prayer.

Out of a misguided fear of being legalistic, many Christians are afraid to exhort each other to grow in connecting with God through the basic, quiet acts of reading Scripture and praying. We should be afraid of legalism (religion), but we should also be *equally* afraid of license (irreligion). Striving to

increasingly obey Scripture's clear command to read Scripture and pray only becomes legalistic when it is done as an attempt to earn God's forgiveness or avoid his punishment, rather than as a glad response to having already been forgiven through Jesus. Regularly feeding on Scripture and praying is non-optional for Christians (1 Tim 2:8; Josh 1:8; 2 Tim 3:16–17; Eph 6:18). Where we often go wrong is when we attempt to work *for* God's acceptance rather than working *from* God's acceptance. In the words of Dallas Willard, "Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning."

In Colossians 3:16, Paul urges all Christians to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." How can we teach and admonish each other with "all wisdom" if the Word of Christ is not dwelling in us richly? It is likely that most members of any given group may not know how to meditate on Scripture or pray in a meaningful way. Even if they do, they are probably doing it no more than one or two days a week. In light of this normative cultural reality, expect to spend the first six to twelve months of a newly-formed discipleship group repeatedly returning to the discipline of spending time alone with God, and patiently, practically equipping each other to read, meditate on, memorize, and pray Scripture.

If multiple of you are repeatedly showing up not having read your Bibles, make a shift in your discipleship group. Instead of continuing to answer the Scripture question in the negative, take 20 minutes at the beginning of your gathering to read Scripture together over the next several weeks. You can use the alternate Discipleship Group Guide, which outlines how to have a discipleship group in this way. You can find this guide later in this section of this handbook or online at frontlinechurch.com/discipleship.

2. Sharing. Briefly check in personally. How is God changing you for the good (sanctification)? What are you facing that's hard (suffering)? What sin or temptation do you need to confess (sin)? David Powlison points out that covering each of these areas allows us to look at the whole picture. This approach is informed by Scripture and is full of love

and compassion, while at the same time preventing imbalance in several directions. In other words, some groups dive deep into confession of sin, but neglect to encourage each other by pointing out growth they see in each other—however small. Other groups dive deep into what's hard, but neglect honest and specific confession of sin.

In his book *Side by Side*, Ed Welch points out that many of us don't even know how to talk about sin with others. When someone confesses sin, we shouldn't simply commiserate. Instead, we should aim for the heart, work to develop a plan, and recognize the messy nature of growth and change. We should always consider which of us might be particularly vulnerable in the present moment (traveling, suffering, loneliness, etc.). We should feel concerned if we can't identify our own temptations, and blessed if we can. For all of us, our goal should be to bring our sins out into the open and grow in saying "no" to sinful desires (Titus 2:11-12). And in every situation, we should thank God for any good fruit we can spot.

3. Spread of the Gospel. Remind the group of the names of your "three," and briefly check-in. How is it going pursuing and praying for them? Your goal should be to prayerfully name three people who don't follow Jesus within your sphere of influence. You will then commit to pray for and engage them in intentional gospel relationships. These people could be your children, family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, or others. Whom would you most love to see become a disciple of Jesus? Who is your heart best shaped to reach for Jesus? Alan Hirsch suggests that we continually ask: (1) Are we in close proximity with those we feel called to? (2) Are we spending regular time with these people? (3) Are we too busy to develop meaningful relationships?

Naming and praying for your "three" every time you gather will guard your group against spiritual navel-gazing and self-obsession. If you haven't identified your three, use this time to write down your three, and then pray together, right on the spot, for God to give you the opportunity to: (1) build a deeper relationship with them, (2) introduce them to Christian community, and (3) share the gospel with them. Pray together that God would save them by opening their eyes to the beauty of Jesus (2 Cor 4:6).

4. Spirit-Filled Prayer. After someone has shared, respond with Spirit-filled prayer. Make sure that your gatherings don't descend into Christianized "talk therapy." In mutual discipleship, sharing that does not pivot to prayer is quickly headed toward self-effort fueled by self-will. No one changes apart from the transforming power of the Spirit. Consider three common barriers to prayer. First, *presumption*. It has been well said that we should not presume that God will do for us apart from prayer what he has explicitly promised to do for us only through prayer! Second, *unbelief*. In the words of an old British missions pamphlet, if our prayer is meager it is because we regard it as supplemental rather than fundamental. Third, *boredom*. Often we don't pray because, if we're honest, we find prayer boring. *This will be the most difficult of the four movements to practice in the group, but it will be the single greatest determiner of the quality of what happens outside of the group.*

How do you create an effective, God-glorifying, life-transforming discipleship group? In the words of Ed Welch, pray one minute longer than you talk! Far too often, when Christians gather, prayer is tacked on at the end and rushed through hurriedly in five minutes or less, after the "real work" of talk therapy and unasked for advice-giving has dragged on for hours. Strive to put heart-centered, Spirit-filled, Scripture-infused prayer at the center, and you will never leave a gathering with a sense of having wasted your time.

Possible signs we are inviting the Spirit into our prayers: (1) when our prayers comfortably move in and out of silence, (2) when we find ourselves praying more than once, and (3) when we pray Scripture, thoughts, pictures, and even gut impressions, spontaneously brought to mind by God. We should always filter these impressions through Scripture, as well as weigh and test them in wise community (1 Thess 5:21; 1 Cor 14:29). We should pray, not only for God to change our circumstances when they are hard, but also to meet us in the midst of those circumstances, to change our hearts and allow us to bear fruit. We can even take the Lord's Prayer line by line, allowing it to direct our prayers towards thanksgiving, confession, requests, and worship.

A guide outlining a discipleship group gathering can be found on the next two pages (download a PDF at frontlinechurch.com/discipleship).

Important: Before your first meeting, everyone should listen to the 45 minute teaching found at frontlinechurch.com/aimfortheheart.

Instructions

1. Invite someone to share.
2. Set a timer for 15 minutes.
3. Have them answer the five questions below.
4. When the timer goes off, take 5 minutes to pray for that person, and for their three.

- ▶ Repeat until everyone has shared and received prayer.
- ▶ Groups of three should set aside at least an hour, and groups of four at least an hour and a half.

Scripture

Briefly check in on your engagement with Scripture since meeting together last.

1. What's one bit of Scripture you're applying to one bit of your life?

Sharing

Briefly check in personally.

2. How's God changing you for the good (sanctification)?
What can we celebrate with you?
3. What are you facing that's hard (suffering)?
How can we sympathize with you?
4. What sin or temptation do you need to confess (sin)?
How can we pray for you and help you?

Spread of the Gospel

Remind the group of the names of your three, and briefly check-in.

5. How's it going pursuing and praying for your three?

Spirit-Filled Prayer

After someone has shared, respond with Spirit-filled prayer.

Tip: Establish relationship first. Before diving into this guide, it is important to establish the kind of relational connection that will invite more personal sharing. Start by sharing life stories—perhaps one or two per meeting. This concise guide will help each of you prepare to share: frontlinechurch.com/lifestories.

Tip: If you are repeatedly showing up not having read your Bibles, switch to using the other side of this sheet for your next eight meetings. Instead of continuing to answer Question 1 below in the negative, you'll take the first 20 minutes of each meeting to read and apply a passage of Scripture together, on the spot.

Tip: Don't be afraid to pivot to prayer when the timer goes off. Do your meetings keep going long? Are you failing to make time for everyone to share? Sharing is important, but prayer provides the power to change! Sometimes when a person needs additional time to share, that's simply a sign that you should set up additional time to meet and pray with them outside of your regular meetings.

One bit of Scripture can do any number of things. It can lead you to (1) adore God, (2) see and hate your sin, or (3) ask for grace. To apply one bit of Scripture to one bit of your life requires at least meditation if not memorization. For more: bit.ly/bitofscript.

When someone confesses sin, we shouldn't simply commiserate. Instead, we should aim for the heart, work to develop a plan, and recognize the messy nature of growth and change. We should feel concerned if we can't identify our own temptations, and blessed if we can. Our chief goal? Bring our sins out into the open and grow in saying no to restless desires (Titus 2:11–12). For more: bit.ly/talkaboutsins.

Who are your "three"? Prayerfully name three people who don't follow Jesus within your sphere of influence. You will then commit to pray for and engage them in intentional gospel relationships. These people could be your children, family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, or others. Whom would you most love to see become a disciple of Jesus? Who is your heart best shaped to reach for Jesus? Naming and praying for your three every time you gather will guard your group against spiritual navel-gazing and self-obsession.

Possible signs we are inviting the Spirit into our prayers: (1) when our prayers comfortably move in and out of silence, (2) when we find ourselves praying more than once, and (3) when we pray Scripture, thoughts, pictures, and even gut impressions, spontaneously brought to mind by God—filtering them by Scripture and weighing them in wise community. See: bit.ly/spiritfilledpraying.

Alternate Instructions

1. Pick one of the six reading plans, and spend 20 minutes working through the directions listed under "Scripture" below.

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Then shift to working through the questions.

2. Invite someone to share.
3. Set a timer for 10 minutes.
4. Have them answer the five questions below.
5. When the timer goes off, take 5 minutes to pray for that person, and for their three.

-
- ▶ Repeat until everyone has shared and received prayer.
 - ▶ Groups of three should set aside at least one hour, and groups of four at least an hour and a half.

#	✓	Mark	Colossians	Romans	Genesis	Psalms	Micah
1	☐	1:1–15	1:1–14	5:1–11	1:1–2:3	1	1–2
2	☐	2:1–12	1:15–23	5:12–21	2:4–25	2	3
3	☐	3:7–35	1:24–2:5	6:1–14	3	42	4
4	☐	8:22–38	2:6–23	6:15–23	4–5	73	5:1–6
5	☐	10:17–45	3:1–4	7:1–6	6–7	90	5:7–15
6	☐	14:53–15:15	3:5–17	7:7–25	8–9	91	6:1–8
7	☐	15:16–39	3:18–4:1	8:1–17	11	107	6:9–16
8	☐	15:42–16:8	4:2–18	8:18–39	12	121	7:1–20

Scripture

- ▶ Briefly pray and ask God to open your eyes to see wonderful things in his Word (Ps 119:18).
- ▶ Then read the passage out loud together.
- ▶ Take 10 minutes to read back over the passage on your own, and look for three things: a **star**, a **question mark**, and an **arrow** (see descriptions in sidebar).
- ▶ As you read on your own, try to write down one to three things under each category.
- ▶ Talk about what you wrote down with your group.
 - Each share a star, and discuss.
 - Each share a question mark, and then do your best to work out answers together from the passage. Don't feel pressure to come up with an answer for every question right now. *Don't get bogged down here!*
 - Each share an arrow, and discuss.



A star: anything that shines out in the passage and draws attention—it can be something important, or something that strikes you



A question mark: anything that is hard to understand—something that you would like to be able to ask the author about



An arrow: anything that applies personally to your everyday life

.....

One-to-One Bible Reading: A Simple Guide for Every Christian, David Helm

Sharing

Briefly check in personally.

1. **How's God changing you for the good (sanctification)?**
What can we celebrate with you?
2. **What are you facing that's hard (suffering)?**
How can we sympathize with you?
3. **What sin or temptation do you need to confess (sin)?**
How can we pray for you and help you?

Spread of the Gospel

Remind the group of the names of your three, and briefly check-in.

4. **How's it going pursuing and praying for your three?**

Spirit-Filled Prayer

After someone has shared, respond with Spirit-filled prayer.



DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS FAQ

HOW DO I START A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP?

If your community group doesn't have any discipleship groups, take steps to form them during family meal. Taking the members of a community group and helping them form into smaller discipleship groups can feel fuzzy—maybe even a bit overwhelming or risky. But as community groups grow in age, they should grow in relational depth, with the hope that these relationships could grow into discipleship groups. One step you can take is to use the family meal as an opportunity to practice discipleship groups. Either during or after the meal, separate the men and women to share more deeply. It might look like saying, “All the men are going into the kitchen, and the women are going into the den. Talk about what’s been going on in your life, and pray for one another.” Maybe do this every other time you meet. After you do this a few times, people will begin to feel more comfortable being vulnerable around one another, and potential leaders will emerge. You now have the seeds to start multiple potential discipleship groups.

Identify facilitators. Discipleship groups work best when someone takes on the responsibility to facilitate the group. Facilitators help drive communication, and keep the gatherings focused. Look for the leaders that naturally emerge during your normal gatherings—people who are particularly good at listening to others. People who know how to aim for the heart and move conversations deeper. People who are humble, gentle, patient, and loving (Eph 4:2). They’ve experienced how God’s kindness leads us to repentance, so they avoid using guilt and shame to manage other people’s stuck patterns of sin. On the other hand, they’ve also experienced how the same grace that saves us, changes us, so neither do they excuse other people’s sin. They have a gospel confidence about them that comes out in the calm and thoughtful way they listen, encourage, and walk alongside others who are stuck or hurting.

They don’t panic when people around them are sinning and suffering. These are people who will at the least do no harm, and who will at the most do a great deal of good. People who live like this are going to emerge in those potential discipleship groups mentioned in the previous point. Once you have identified facilitators, invite them to serve in this role and participate in a Prayer and Planning Meeting to create discipleship groups.

Follow the sections entitled “How Do I Talk To My Community Group About Multiplication?” and “How Do I Lead a Prayer and Planning Meeting?” under the “Multiplication” section of this handbook.

These sections outline how to plan and communicate a community group multiplication, but the same principles generally apply to starting discipleship groups. Talk to your community group about the importance of discipleship groups. Have a Prayer and Planning Meeting with the community group leaders and prospective facilitators. Out of these steps, create discipleship groups of three or four people, including a facilitator over each.

Encourage everyone to do a little homework before they start. Before you gather for the first time, the discipleship group facilitator should listen to the audio training on how to facilitate a gospel-centered discipleship group (frontlinechurch.com/discipleship). In addition, everyone in the discipleship group should set aside time to listen to the audio teaching on the do’s and don’ts of discipleship groups, entitled “When in Doubt, Aim for the Heart” (frontlinechurch.com/aimfortheheart). When you gather for the first time, discuss how you were each personally instructed or corrected by that teaching. These trainings can be found at frontlinechurch.com/discipleship.

Establish confidentiality. Once a new group is formed, discuss confidentiality at the outset. Give each person in the room the opportunity to describe how they understand the mutual commitment

they're making to confidentiality. Decide what you will share or not share with your spouses, if any of you are married. It is important that you not repeat anything that was shared with you in confidence in the context of a discipleship group unless you (1) get permission from the person, or (2) believe there is some potentially harmful or criminal act being perpetrated against them or others, or (3) determine someone is consistently defiant and unrepentant in their sin.

Share life stories. When you first begin to gather as a discipleship group, dedicate time to sharing your stories. Don't rush through this step. As we know each other more deeply and understand where we have been in our life, we will be able to better disciple one another towards Jesus. It might take several meetings for you to allow everyone to share their story. For more information on how to share your story, see the section entitled "How Do We Share Our Life Stories?"

Lead by facilitation. Leadership in a discipleship group is by facilitation, meaning, the leader is a peer who is merely helping to keep conversation moving and focused. The facilitator should never feel more important than the others, or that they need to present a false spirituality. Rather, they should lead by example in recognizing their need and in being vulnerable. Facilitators should regularly communicate any needs or concerns with their community group leaders.

Strive for consistency and clarity. Our goal is that discipleship groups would meet at least twice a month, typically on the second and fourth week of the month. Yet we should recognize that on occasion, people will not be able to come. When you launch a new discipleship group, make it a priority to be there whenever possible. Put it in your calendar. As much as is realistically possible, try and meet on the same day at the same time in the same place. By meeting regularly, we not only maintain relationship, but we can also grow in vulnerability and depth. Avoid canceling. If at least one other person can attend, the facilitator should still meet with them. As we model consistency, we teach our people what they should value and imitate.

When you meet, use the Discipleship Group Guide. After the first few gatherings where you share

your stories, use the Discipleship Group Guide as a template for your time together. This guide allows everyone to share and prevents anyone from dominating the conversation. You can refer to the guide earlier in this section, or print off physical copies at frontlinechurch.com/discipleship.

HOW DO WE SHARE OUR LIFE STORIES?

Planning to Share. Identify who will share their story ahead of time. In other words, as a rule, don't ask people to share right on the spot. To tell their story well, people need time to reflect and pray. If you're the one who has been asked to share next, consider writing your story down to help you reflect and share. You may even need to simply read what you have written when your turn comes. Sharing your story may take up to 30 minutes.

If you have a story you have never told anyone—or told very few people—and you are wrestling with what to share or how to share it in a way that will protect you and edify others, reach out to one (or several) of your leaders and ask if you can process your story with them in private ahead of time. That way, when you share your story, it will be the second time you share, and it will also allow you, with the help of your leaders, to discern what to share or not share and how best to share it.

Preparing to Share. As we prepare to tell our stories, it's best to examine and talk about our lives in three ways: (1) how we have grown, (2) how we have suffered, and (3) how we have sinned. It's easy to fall into a "just the facts" format when sharing our life stories, but if we think of our stories as just a list of dates, places, and names, we won't end up sharing the parts of our story that are most meaningful and that help others begin to really know us. Instead, we should think about how we would answer the following questions: *How has God used the good, bad, and really difficult things in my life to form me into the person I am today? Who was I before I met Jesus? How has Jesus changed me? Who am I becoming?*

Prayerfully Responding When We Share. After someone has shared, be sure to immediately and vocally thank the person who shared their story and affirm their courage and vulnerability, especially if it

was a hard or painful story to share. If it moved you, blessed you, or broke your heart, respond and say those things out loud to that person.

Finally, gather around the person who has shared and pray for them. Have multiple people lay hands on them—asking their permission first, if that is a new experience for them or if they are particularly emotional. Pray vocal and compassionate prayers over them, inviting the Holy Spirit to minister to them in that moment. Pray prayers of encouragement and thanksgiving for their life. Provide tissues if needed.

For detailed guidelines on responding with prayer, see “Appendix B: A Guide to Praying For Each Other” in this handbook.

WHAT IF WE ARE ALL HAVING A HARD TIME READING SCRIPTURE?

If multiple of you are repeatedly showing up not having read your Bibles, make a shift in your discipleship group. Instead of continuing to answer the Scripture question in the negative, set aside the first 20 minutes of your gatherings to read Scripture together over the next several weeks. Use the alternate Discipleship Group Guide, which outlines how to have a discipleship group in this way. You can find this guide in the “Discipleship Groups” section of this handbook or online at frontlinechurch.com/discipleship.

To read Scripture together, select one of the provided reading plans and use the following steps.

1. Briefly pray and ask God to open your eyes to see wonderful things in his Word (Ps 119:18)
2. Read the passage out loud together.
3. Take ten minutes to read back over the passage on your own, and look for three things: a **star**, a **question mark**, and an **arrow**. As you read on your own, try to write down one to three things under each category.
 - **A star:** anything that shines out in the passage and draws attention—it can be something important, or something that strikes you.

- **A question mark:** anything that is hard to understand—something that you would like to be able to ask the author about.

- **An arrow:** anything that applies personally to your everyday life.

4. Talk about what you wrote down with your group.

- Each share a star, and discuss
- Each share a question mark, and then do your best to work out answers together from the passage. Don’t feel pressure to come up with an answer for every question right now. *Don’t get bogged down here!*
- Each share an arrow, and discuss.

WHAT IF SOMEONE DOMINATES THE CONVERSATION? / WHAT IF SOMEONE SAYS SOMETHING UNBIBLICAL? / WHAT IF SOMEONE IS FREQUENTLY ABSENT OR DISENGAGED?

These are common questions that come up in both discipleship groups and family meals. You can find detailed answers to each of these questions under the “Family Meals FAQ” section of this handbook.